

LCQ16: Recidivism rate of discharged prisoners

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-chun and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

Recidivism rate means the percentage of re-admission of local persons in custody to correctional institutions following conviction of a new offence within two years after discharge. Regarding the recidivism rates of discharged prisoners, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the overall recidivism rate of discharged prisoners in each of the past 10 years, the trend of the year-on-year changes and, among such discharged prisoners, the respective recidivism rates of those who were adults (i.e. aged 21 or above) and young persons (i.e. aged below 21) during their respective previous sentences;

(2) of the recidivism rate, in each of the past 10 years, of those discharged prisoners who had served a sentence of imprisonment for conviction of drug trafficking offences and, among them, the recidivism rate of those who had served a sentence of eight years' imprisonment or above; and

(3) of the Government's new measures in the coming three years to reduce the recidivism rate of discharged prisoners?

Reply:

President,

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) is committed to providing a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy custodial environment for persons in custody (PICs), as well as appropriate rehabilitation programmes to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into society after release. CSD has also worked in partnership with various stakeholders to promote the message of supporting offender rehabilitation and to strengthen community education for crime prevention purposes. However, whether PICs will reoffend is affected by various factors such as personal, family, peer, social and economic factors.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Shiu's question is as follows:

(1) Over the last ten years, the recidivism rate (i.e. the percentage of re-admission of local PICs to correctional institutions following conviction of a new offence within two years after discharge), calculated based on the year of discharge, decreased from 34.4 per cent in 2007 to 24.8 per cent in 2016.

Details are set out below:

| Year of discharge | Recidivism rate of local PICs (per cent) | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| | Young offenders (aged under 21 when serving their previous sentence) | Adult offenders (aged 21 or above when serving their previous sentence) | Total |
| 2007 | 24.2 | 35.6 | 34.4 |
| 2008 | 26.8 | 35.3 | 34.3 |
| 2009 | 23.2 | 34.3 | 33.0 |
| 2010 | 20.9 | 32.3 | 31.0 |
| 2011 | 17.7 | 30.5 | 29.2 |
| 2012 | 15.6 | 30.5 | 29.0 |
| 2013 | 13.4 | 28.6 | 27.1 |
| 2014 | 12.6 | 27.2 | 25.9 |
| 2015 | 11.9 | 28.3 | 27.1 |
| 2016 | 10.2 | 25.7 | 24.8 |

(2) CSD does not have statistical figures on recidivism rate by category of offence.

(3) One of the strategic focuses set out in the Strategic Plan published by CSD in 2018 is to address the diverse needs of PICs and provide appropriate rehabilitation programmes so as to reduce the chance of reoffending, with a view to facilitating their reintegration into the society after release. Therefore, CSD is committed to strengthening and enhancing current rehabilitation programmes and implementing the following initiatives:

(i) Regarding psychological services, professional treatment is provided to PICs by clinical psychologists to improve their mental wellbeing, facilitate their adjustment to life in correctional institutions, and help them alter their offending behaviour. Comprehensive therapeutic programmes that are tailored to address the specific needs of sex offenders, female and male PICs, young offenders, and inmates of Drug Addiction Treatment Centres (DATCs) are also provided. For example:

(a) Sex offenders will be assigned by CSD to the Sex Offenders Evaluation and Treatment Unit for systematic assessment on their reoffending risks and psychological treatment that addresses their individual needs, so as to help them rehabilitate;

(b) Since the establishment of Psy Gym by CSD, which caters for female PICs who are assessed to have high risk of reoffending or in need of treatment for their developmental and emotional issues, at Lo Wu Correctional Institution in 2011, CSD has been providing treatment to those who are psychologically

disturbed (including trauma after abuse, self-harm tendency, interpersonal and mental health issues etc.) in a therapeutic setting. As male PICs have mental needs that are different from female, a pilot treatment programme called Life Gym – a positive living centre for male PICs, was launched at Stanley Prison in November 2018 to provide treatment to address the needs of male PICs. The Life Gym also provides self-help groups where the participants can support and encourage each other to improve, thereby assisting them in bringing out their unique qualities and staying away from crime;

(c) As regards drug addiction treatment programmes, in addition to mandatory drug addiction treatment, CSD has explored in recent years the introduction of the element of mindfulness to treatment programmes for female drug abusers. In 2017, a "Mindfulness Corner", which integrated for the first time the clinical use of mindfulness into psychological treatment programme, was set up at Nei Kwu Correctional Institution. CSD plans to roll out a similar programme in DATC for male inmates at the end of this year; and

(d) To nurture positive thinking among young PICs and lower their chance of reoffending, CSD provides appropriate counseling and timely intervention, including a systematic treatment programme named "Offending Behaviour Programme" which targets at reducing criminogenic factors related to offending; and the "Heart Start for Young Offenders" which encourages parents' participation in the rehabilitation of young PICs and addresses the psychological needs of nowadays families and young PICs.

(ii) Given the crucial importance of family support to young PICs' rehabilitation, CSD has been regularly organising various activities in different themes under the "Inmate-Parent Programme" and other specialised inmate-parent activities based on the vocation training courses provided at various correctional institutions. Furthermore, CSD plans to promote adult PICs' rehabilitation by enhancing support from their family and will launch the "Rehabilitation Family Programme" (RFP). Through various activities, talks and sharing sessions, RFP is expected to help the participants connect with their family and improve their communication, so as to bolster their determination to start anew.

(iii) For the purpose of nurturing PICs' character and enhancing their employability, CSD offers appropriate assistance to adult PICs who wish to pursue further studies on a voluntary basis and provides market-oriented vocational courses to strengthen their resilience and positive values, thereby assisting them to reintegrate into the society. Relevant measures are as follows:

(a) CSD provides half-day formal education to young PICs aged between 14 and 20, and encourages adult PICs to pursue further studies, enrolling in distance learning courses in their spare time according to their interests and abilities and taking public examinations under the users-pay principle. Correctional institutions provide appropriate assistance to PICs. For example, CSD has set up a number of education funds and subsidy schemes for PICs to apply for financial assistance if they want to pursue further studies but have difficulties in paying for public examination fees, tuition fees of

distance learning programmes, books and educational aids;

(b) CSD will continue to implement Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and organise relevant educational activities in institutions for young PICs. Similar programmes in the form of small interest groups will be extended to correctional institutions accommodating adult PICs to develop their creativity, coordination and problem-solving skills, and to equip them with knowledge for adjusting to the pace of society after their release;

(c) In respect of vocational training, having regard to the situation of the local employment market, CSD has been collaborating with the Employees Retraining Board, the Construction Industry Council and the Vocational Training Council etc. to provide over 40 vocational training programmes to eligible adult PICs due for discharge within three to 24 months. Courses offered in recent years include Floor Layering for Interior Renovation and AutoCAD in Renovation Drawings Certificate Courses. Among the new courses being offered in 2019-20, the Virtual Reality technology has been adopted, including Virtual Reality Welding and Virtual Reality Visual Merchandising and Retail Management. All courses are organised by accredited training bodies eligible to issue accredited qualification to those who have completed the courses. While 40 per cent of the courses are recognised under the qualification framework, the remaining programmes are well regarded in the market; and

(d) CSD also provides 20 half-day vocational training courses for all young PICs covering construction, business, service industries, including business fundamentals, mechanical handicraft, café management (including technique in latte art), and catering service in western cuisine.

(iv) To help PICs reset their targets in life and encourage them to establish their own business after release, CSD has been collaborating with the Merchants Support for Rehabilitated Offenders Committee Limited and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong Youth Career Development Service to launch a pilot scheme entitled "Prisoner Entrepreneurship Pilot Programme" in March 2019. The scheme is on trial at Stanley Prison, which aims at providing life planning, career development and entrepreneurship courses etc. for PICs, so as to help them set business goals prior to their release. The scheme will be adopted in other correctional institutions if the results are satisfactory.

In order to review and enhance the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation programmes and also to position future development, with a view to lowering recidivism rates, CSD has been proactively collaborating with local universities and launched a three-year longitudinal study on rehabilitated persons in July 2018, to follow rehabilitated persons for three years after their release and examine in depth their needs.